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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 004593

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SUBJECT: REQUEST FOR DEMARCH ON UNAMI DRAWDOWN

REF: A. BAGHDAD 4422

[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 4581

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) This is an Action Request for the Department. See paras 7 and 8.

[1](#)2. (C) SUMMARY: UN Special Representative to the Secretary General (SRSG) Ashraf Qazi sent a cable on November 27 to HQ UN which recommended a major reduction of staff in Iraq. Under this recommendation, which was quickly approved based on security concerns, the United Nations Assistance Mission Iraq (UNAMI) has already begun a staff transfer to Amman, Jordan, and Kuwait City, Kuwait. Our understanding is that this draw down will reduce their overall manning in Iraq by approximately 40 percent. U.S. Embassy Baghdad believes this reduction sends the wrong message to the Iraqi people, the Iraqi government, the NGO community and our coalition partners in Iraqi. We also believe this draw down will significantly impact UNAMI's ability to remain effectively engaged in Iraq at a critical time. Embassy requests the Department -- through a proposed demarche to be delivered by USUN -- express its strongest concerns to HQ UN over this staff reduction and urge the UN to revise or reverse this decision. END SUMMARY.

THE DRAW DOWN AS WE UNDERSTAND IT

[1](#)3. (C) SRSG Qazi sent a cable to Headquarters UN on November 27 recommending that UNAMI staffing in Iraq be reduced from 95 to 55 positions as soon as possible. We have been told that under this recommendation, which was quickly approved, these 40 positions and their incumbents would be moved to Amman, Jordan, and Kuwait City, Kuwait, where they could continue to support UNAMI's efforts remotely. This realignment has already begun and is expected to be complete in coming weeks. UNAMI currently has 91 staff members in country, of which about 36 will depart. This represents a 40% reduction of in-country staff.

[1](#)4. (C) We have been told the recommendation for the staff realignment was based on security concerns, specifically, the lack of hard cover protection from indirect fire over UNAMI's housing compound. Deputy SRSG Michael von der Schulenburg stated to US Embassy officials on December 12 that it would cost an estimated 33 million USD to construct overhead protection for the housing trailers occupied by UNAMI staff, and this was a major factor in their decision to draw down. Schulenburg characterized the draw down as temporary, saying it would last until the security situation stabilizes or the housing protection issue is resolved. He hinted that there

was some flexibility in the manning and that it would be re-evaluated in approximately four months.

THE DRAWDOWN'S IMPACT IN IRAQ

¶5. (SBU) The UN decision to draw down in Baghdad jeopardizes the UN's ability to carry out needed projects in Iraq and has already begun to have an impact. For example, the reduction in UNAMI's constitutional review team -- which has gone from three Baghdad-based staff members to one -- has negatively and visibly led to diminished UN engagement in advising the Iraqi Council of Representatives on Constitutional review. We are also concerned about planned cuts in personnel working on the political team, which is going from nine to three Baghdad-based personnel. This team has been a consistent advocate for national dialogue and legislative engagement. The human rights team has similarly been reduced, from three to two Baghdad-based staff members, and we understand there are planned reductions in many other key offices.

¶6. (SBU) Even prior to these cuts, the UN was operating in Baghdad at a level much lower than circumstances require -- for instance, there has been no UNHCR international representative in a country with one of the highest number of Internally Displaced Persons in the world. UN staff working in Amman cannot engage Iraqi government officials, members of parliament, or key nongovernmental players in Iraq in a sufficiently sustained manner to influence events in this rapidly changing political environment.

Action Request

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¶7. (SBU) Taking into consideration these concerns with regard to the UNAMI drawdown, post requests the Department instruct USUN to demarche the UNSYG or other appropriate high level UN official, taking into consideration the following points:

-- We are strongly concerned about the UN decision to draw down UNAMI staff posted in Baghdad by approximately 40 percent;

-- The decision, which was taken without external consultation, took the U.S. and others in the international community by surprise. It comes at an important juncture in international efforts to help Iraqis reduce violence and undertake National Reconciliation;

-- Without a robust presence in Baghdad, we are concerned that the UN will not be able to respond dynamically to rapidly changing circumstances in Iraq or engage in a sustained manner with key Iraqi decision-makers;

-- 2007 will be a critical year in the development of Iraqi Democracy, with key decisions to be made on the final status of Kirkuk, the review of the constitution, and the role of provincial governments. There is also a strong possibility of referenda on Kirkuk and constitutional review, as well as a new round of elections for provincial councils. The decision to reduce UN staff will impede the international community's ability to assist Iraq in meeting these challenges;

-- In a broader sense, the decision to draw down UNAMI in Baghdad could also be interpreted as a significant lessening of the UN's commitment to the Iraqi government and citizens who are struggling in Iraq for freedom from oppression and to establish security. It sends a signal to the rest of the international community that the UN sees efforts in Iraq as too tough or difficult to resolve;

-- We understand the fundamental importance of security for international personnel working in Iraq. We, ourselves, take numerous measures to lessen the risk presented to staff serving in Iraq. However, as we all take steps to improve security, we cannot in the interim lessen our commitment to the Iraqi government or people;

-- We strongly urge the UN to reverse the decision to draw down the staff of UNAMI in Baghdad, and to take every step to ensure full staffing as you make those security upgrades you deem feasible. Resuming fully UNAMI operations in Iraq's capital would indicate to Iraqis and the world the commitment of the UN to Iraq's democracy;

-- We would hope the UN would further consider taking steps to actually increase its presence in Baghdad, perhaps through the positioning of permanent international staff from UNHCR or other key agencies under represented or not represented at all in Iraq.

18. (C) Post requests the Department consider seeking support from other Coalition governments, including through requesting they also demarche the UN at a high level on this issue.

KHALILZAD